



An Extended Guide · No. 1288

Safe Propane & Natural Gas Handling (and Leaks)

What to do the
moment you smell gas

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! Before you begin — a quick safety note.

This guide covers work involving propane and natural gas, which can cause serious injury, fire, or property damage if something goes wrong. It's here for general information only, not professional advice. If you're not completely comfortable — or if your local codes require a licensed pro — please stop and hire a qualified your gas company or a licensed gas fitter. Turn off the power at the breaker before any electrical step. Never work on gas lines yourself; if you smell gas, leave right away and call your gas company or 911. There's no shame in calling a pro — that's often the smart, safe choice. You follow this guide at your own risk. — Bill

A Note From Bill

Propane and natural gas are, honestly, two of the easiest fuels to live with — no stale gasoline to think about, no carburetor headaches. This guide covers the handful of habits that keep them that easy, safely.

Nothing here is complicated. It's the kind of thing that becomes second nature after you've done it once or twice — and knowing it before you need it is what matters most.

What you'll get out of this guide

- Why gas fuels smell like rotten eggs, and what that smell is telling you
- How to store and handle propane cylinders and tanks the safe way
- A simple way to check any connection for a leak
- Exactly what to do — and not do — the moment you smell gas
- How this looks a little different for town homes and country homes

★ Calm, not scary

Gas leaks are rare when fuel is handled well. This guide is here so you know exactly what to do on the rare chance one happens — not to make you anxious about propane or natural gas in general. (330) 200-8042 anytime.

The Whole Guide in One Page

Short on time? Here's everything that matters, distilled down.

- ❑ Propane and natural gas both have a rotten-egg smell added on purpose, so a leak announces itself.
- ❑ Store propane cylinders outdoors, upright, away from heat — never indoors or in a hot car.
- ❑ Check connections for leaks with soapy water: bubbles mean a leak.
- ❑ Never overfill a propane tank, and never try to top one off yourself.
- ❑ If you ever smell gas: no switches, no flames, leave the area, and call your gas company or 911 from a safe distance.

✓ Know your shutoffs before you need them

Find your home's main gas shutoff and your propane tank's valve today, while there's no rush. It's much easier to locate calmly than during an actual leak.

Why Gas Fuels Smell Like Rotten Eggs

That unmistakable smell isn't an accident — it's one of the smartest safety features built into propane and natural gas.

Both fuels are naturally odorless. On their own, a leak would give you no warning at all. So an odorant is added deliberately — the same rotten-egg smell you'd notice from a stove burner left on — specifically so your nose catches a leak long before it becomes dangerous.

- The smell itself isn't the danger — it's an early-warning system working exactly as intended.
- Any time you notice it, even faintly, treat it as real and worth acting on.
- Some people have a weaker sense of smell than others — CO and gas detectors are a good backup, not a substitute for taking the smell seriously when you do notice it.

✓ If in doubt, it's a leak

Don't spend time debating whether the smell is “really” gas. Treat it as a leak, act accordingly, and let a professional confirm it once you're safely away.

Handling Propane Cylinders Day to Day

The small refillable cylinders — the kind you'd also use on a gas grill — are the most common propane fuel source for a portable generator.

- Store cylinders **outdoors**, standing upright, away from the house and any source of heat or flame.
- Never store one indoors, in an attached garage near living space, or inside a hot car — heat raises the pressure inside.
- Keep the valve closed and the cap or plug in place on any cylinder that isn't connected.
- Give cylinders a quick visual check now and then — look for rust, dents, or damage around the valve.

✓ Keep a couple on hand

Many households keep two or three cylinders in rotation — one connected, one or two in reserve outdoors. There's a dedicated guide in this series on tank sizes and how long each one tends to last.

If You Have a Larger Yard Tank

Some homes keep a bigger propane tank in the yard instead of, or alongside, small cylinders. The safe-handling basics are the same, with a few differences worth knowing.

- A larger tank is typically installed and connected by your propane supplier, with a regulator already set up correctly.
- Keep the area around it clear of leaves, snow, and anything else that could pile up against it.
- Know where its shutoff valve is, and make sure everyone who might need to use it does too.
- There's a dedicated guide in this series on connecting a generator to a propane supply if you're setting one up.

✓ Let your supplier do the heavy lifting

Sizing, installing, and filling a larger tank is exactly what your propane supplier does for a living. Lean on them for that part.

Why a Tank Is Never Filled to the Brim

If you've ever noticed a propane tank doesn't feel completely full even right after filling, that's by design, not a mistake.

Propane expands as it warms, and a tank needs room left inside for that expansion. A professionally filled tank is deliberately left with some space — that's normal, correct, and exactly how it should be.

- Never try to “top off” a propane tank or cylinder yourself.
- Have cylinders refilled or exchanged at a proper propane retailer or exchange station, not improvised at home.
- If a tank or cylinder ever seems overfilled, or the valve won't close fully, don't use it — have your propane supplier take a look.

! Leave the filling to the professionals

This is one part of propane handling that's genuinely not a DIY job. A proper fill station has the gauges and training to do it safely every time.

The Soapy-Water Leak Check

This is the easiest, safest way to check any propane connection — no special tools required.

- ❑ Mix a little dish soap with water in a small spray bottle or cup.
- ❑ With the gas on, apply the soapy water to the connection — hose ends, the regulator, the tank valve.
- ❑ Watch closely for growing bubbles. Bubbles mean gas is escaping.
- ❑ If you see bubbles, turn the gas off, tighten the connection if it's something you can safely do, then test again.

If bubbles keep showing up after you've tightened a connection, stop using it and have a professional take a look rather than trying to force a fix.

✓ A good habit before every use

A quick soapy-water check each time you connect a cylinder takes under a minute and catches most problems before they become a real leak.

The Gas Piped Into Your Home

If your home already has natural gas for the furnace, water heater, or stove, a tri-fuel generator can tap that same supply.

- Natural gas arrives continuously through the pipe — there's nothing to store, refill, or run out of, as long as the gas system is up.
- A generator hookup taps its own branch off the meter, sized for the load — never sharing a branch meant for the furnace or water heater.
- The hookup itself is a licensed plumber or gas fitter's job, start to finish.
- There's a dedicated guide in this series on exactly what that hookup involves, if you're considering one.

✓ **Nothing to store means fewer habits to remember**

This is one of natural gas's quiet strengths — once it's connected properly, there's no cylinder to check or fuel to rotate.

Finding Your Home's Gas Shutoff

This is one of those things that's easy to locate calmly today and very hard to find in a hurry during an emergency.

- The main natural gas shutoff is usually near the gas meter, often a lever or valve you turn a quarter turn to close.
- A propane tank or cylinder has its own shutoff valve right at the tank.
- Once you find yours, consider a quick photo or note of exactly where it is and how it operates.
- If you're ever unsure how to operate your specific shutoff, ask your gas company or propane supplier to walk you through it.

! Know it before, not during

If you ever do need to shut off gas in an emergency, that's not the moment to be learning how the valve works for the first time.

Gas Safety in Town or the Suburbs

Homes in town usually have natural gas piped to the street, and neighbors close enough that a leak concerns more than just your own house.

- **Know your gas company's emergency number** in addition to 911 — many people don't look this up until they need it.
- **Buried lines near property lines** mean it's worth calling 811 before any digging, even for something as simple as a fence post.
- **Close neighbors raise the stakes on any leak.** If you smell gas outdoors near the street or a neighbor's yard, it's still worth reporting — don't assume it's someone else's problem to notice.
- **Renting or in a condo?** Know who to notify — your landlord or property manager — in addition to the gas company, if you ever suspect a leak.

✓ A five-minute task worth doing

Save your gas company's emergency number in your phone this week. It's the kind of thing you want on hand instantly, not searched for in a panic.

Gas Safety When You're Rural or on a Well

Without natural gas at the road, propane usually carries more of the load out here — and a few country-specific details are worth knowing.

- **No gas line often means a bigger propane tank**, which makes proper siting matter — keep it a safe distance from the house, your well, and any well house, per your propane supplier's guidance and local code.
- **Propane and your well don't directly interact** — a leak vents into the air rather than the ground — but keeping the tank well clear of the wellhead is still standard practice, and your propane supplier can confirm the right setback for your tank size.
- **Response times are longer in the country**. If you ever smell gas, that's even more reason to get everyone out immediately and call for help rather than waiting to see if it clears on its own.
- **Delivery trucks need clear access**. Keep the path to your tank reasonably clear of snow, brush, or parked equipment so a refill never gets delayed.

None of this changes the well pump directly — but a rural home leaning on propane for its generator is very often the same home leaning on that generator to keep water flowing. Treat the fuel supply with the same care you'd give the pump itself.

★ Let's site it right the first time

Tank placement is one of those things that's much easier to get right when it's installed than to fix later. I'm glad to help you think through the location before your supplier sets the tank.

The Moment You Smell Gas: What to Do

This is the single most important page in this guide. Read it now, calmly, so you never have to read it for the first time during an actual leak.

- ❑ Don't flip any light switches, don't light a match or a lighter, and don't use your phone while you're still inside.
- ❑ Leave the area calmly — get everyone else out of the house too, including pets if you can do so quickly.
- ❑ Once you're a safe distance away, call your gas company or 911.
- ❑ Wait for a professional to tell you it's safe before going back in.

! No switches means no switches

Even a light switch or a garage door opener can create a tiny spark. Leave everything as it is and get outside first — flip nothing on your way out.

A Few Things to Avoid During a Suspected Leak

Most of gas-leak safety is about what you don't do in those first few minutes.

- Don't try to find the leak yourself, or “just take a quick look” before leaving.
- Don't start a car in an attached garage, even to move it out of the way.
- Don't open windows on your way out hoping to air things out — just leave.
- Don't go back in for anything — a pet, a phone, anything — until a professional says it's safe.

! Nothing inside is worth the risk

It's a hard instinct to fight, but nothing you'd go back in for is worth it. Let the professionals clear the house first.

Once You're a Safe Distance Away

The urgency of the first few minutes gives way to a calmer set of steps once everyone's safely outside.

- Call your gas company's emergency line or 911, and describe what you smelled and where.
- Stay together, upwind if there's any wind at all, and well clear of the house.
- Let responders or your gas company do the investigating — don't return to “help” them look.
- Once you're told it's safe, ask what caused it so you can prevent a repeat.

✓ There's no such thing as overreacting here

Gas companies handle reported leaks all the time, including ones that turn out to be minor. Reporting one that's nothing is a far better outcome than not reporting one that matters.

Connecting, Disconnecting & Transporting Cylinders

A few habits make routine cylinder handling safe without much thought at all.

- Always connect and disconnect cylinders outdoors, with the generator off.
- Hand-tighten fittings snugly, then check with the soapy-water test before you rely on the connection.
- Transport cylinders upright, secured so they can't tip, with a vehicle window cracked for airflow.
- Never leave a cylinder in a hot trunk or car for longer than the trip to bring it home.

✓ A steady routine beats memory

Doing it the same careful way every time means you're never trying to remember the safe steps under pressure.

Where Propane Belongs Between Uses

Storage is where a lot of propane's simplicity really shows — a few basics, then it just waits.

- **Outdoors, always.** Never in the house, a closed shed with other ignition sources nearby, or an attached garage near living space.
- **Upright, on stable, level ground** so a cylinder can't tip or roll.
- **Away from heat** — direct sun on a summer afternoon, a grill, a fire pit, or anything with a flame.
- **Capped when disconnected**, with the valve fully closed.

There's a dedicated guide in this series on fuel storage and shelf life if you'd like the fuller picture, including how gasoline compares.

★ A simple setup, done once

I'm glad to help you set up a safe little storage spot for cylinders — somewhere convenient, outdoors, and out of the weather.

Don't Forget: Gas Fuels Still Make CO

Propane and natural gas burn cleaner than gasoline, but “cleaner” doesn't mean carbon-monoxide-free. The exhaust rule never changes.

- Any generator burning any fuel — including propane and natural gas — produces carbon monoxide in its exhaust.
- Run it outdoors only, at least 20 feet from the house, exhaust pointed away from doors, windows, and vents.
- Never in a garage, basement, shed, or carport, no matter which fuel is powering it.
- There's a full guide in this series devoted entirely to carbon monoxide safety, worth reading alongside this one.

! Two separate dangers, both real

A gas leak and carbon monoxide are different hazards with different warning signs, but they share the same fix: get outside into fresh air and get help.

A Quick Word on Hooking Up to Your Gas Supply

Connecting a generator to propane or natural gas safely is mostly about a few habits, on top of the professional hookup itself.

- A **quick-connect fitting** lets a portable generator disconnect easily between uses — check it's seated properly each time.
- Inspect the hose from tank or meter to generator for cracks, wear, or damage before each use.
- Never force a fitting that doesn't seat easily — that's a sign something's misaligned, not a sign to push harder.
- There are dedicated guides in this series on the full natural-gas and propane-supply hookup process, if you're setting one up for the first time.

✓ A quick look before every use

A 30-second check of the hose and connection before you start up becomes second nature fast, and it's the best habit on this whole list.

After Storms and Through the Seasons

Ohio weather is hard on outdoor equipment. A couple of seasonal checks keep your gas connections in good shape.

- After a bad storm, give tanks, cylinders, and connections a quick visual check for damage before your next use.
- Clear snow and ice away from a propane tank's valve and regulator rather than letting it build up.
- Watch for ice damming or heavy snow load near your gas meter, and keep the area around it clear.
- A freeze-thaw cycle can loosen a connection that was snug in warmer weather — worth a soapy-water recheck each spring and fall.

✓ Pair it with your generator's seasonal check

If you're already doing a spring or fall look-over of the generator itself, fold the fuel connections into that same walk-around.

When to Call Me — and When to Call the Gas Company

I'm glad to help with a lot of this, but a few things genuinely belong with your gas company or a licensed gas fitter, and I'll always say so plainly.

- Setting up safe cylinder storage and connection habits — happy to help.
- Coordinating a new natural-gas or large-propane hookup — I'll help plan it, and a licensed gas fitter does the actual connection.
- An actual gas leak or the rotten-egg smell — that's your gas company or 911, every time, not a call to me first.
- A general fuel-safety walkthrough for your household — happy to help with that any day.

I come to you, here in Portage County and nearby, and I'll always point you to the right professional when a job calls for one.

★ Bill's Home Tech

Call or text (330) 200-8042. Tech Made Simple, Service Made Personal. Every visit is \$99 flat and 30-day come-back-free — if you're not happy, I'll make it right.

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Dog-ear this page or copy it onto a card near your fuel storage.

I want to...	Remember this
Store propane	Outdoors, upright, away from heat — never indoors or in a hot car
Check for a leak	Soapy water on the connection — bubbles mean a leak
Fill a tank	Never top it off yourself — use a proper fill station or exchange
React to a gas smell	No switches or flames — leave, then call from a safe distance
Connect to natural gas	Licensed plumber or gas fitter only — its own branch off the meter
Stay safe from CO too	Outdoors only, 20+ feet away, regardless of fuel
Get help	Call Bill: (330) 200-8042 — or your gas company for a suspected leak

Words People Use

A few gas-safety terms in plain language.

Q: Odorant

The rotten-egg smell added to naturally odorless propane and natural gas, specifically so a leak is noticeable.

Q: Regulator

The device that steps propane down from tank pressure to the steady pressure an appliance or generator needs.

Q: Shutoff valve

The valve that stops gas flow to your home or a specific appliance — worth knowing the location of before you need it.

Q: Quick-connect

A fitting that lets a portable generator attach to and detach from a gas or propane line easily between uses.

Q: Sediment trap

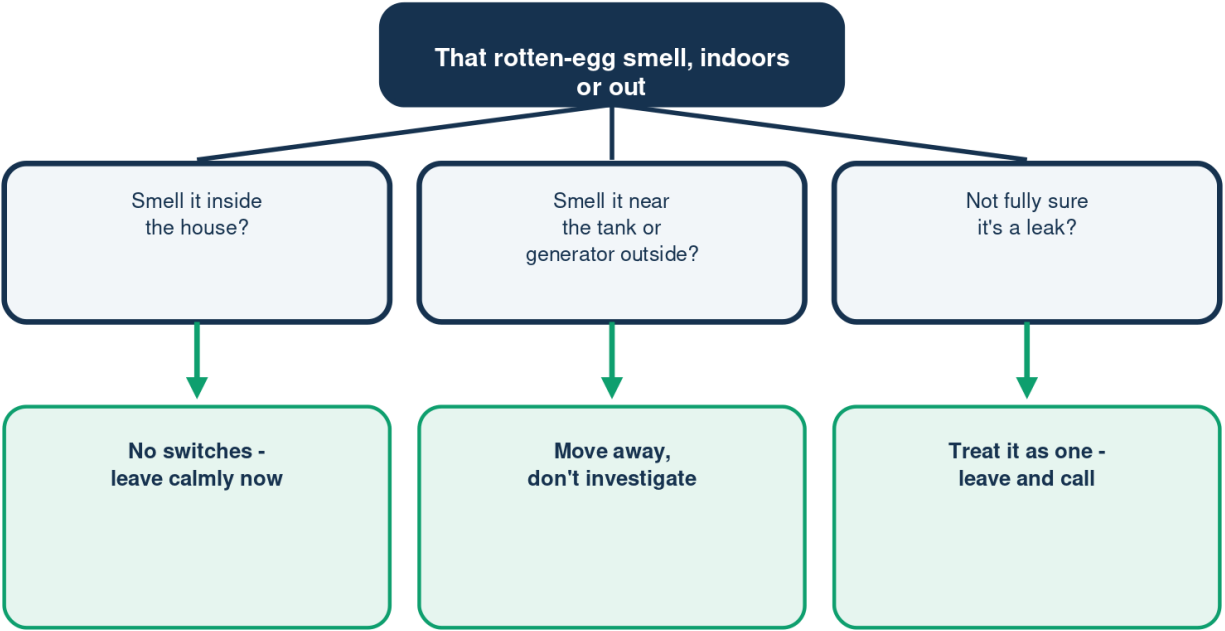
A small dip in a gas line, installed near an appliance, that catches debris before it reaches the burner.

Q: Requalification

The periodic inspection propane cylinders need over their lifespan to confirm they're still safe to fill.

If You Smell Gas

The same response, every time, anywhere on the property



Once you're a safe distance away, call your gas company or 911.

Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.

Checking a Connection for Leaks

A minute with soapy water, every time you connect

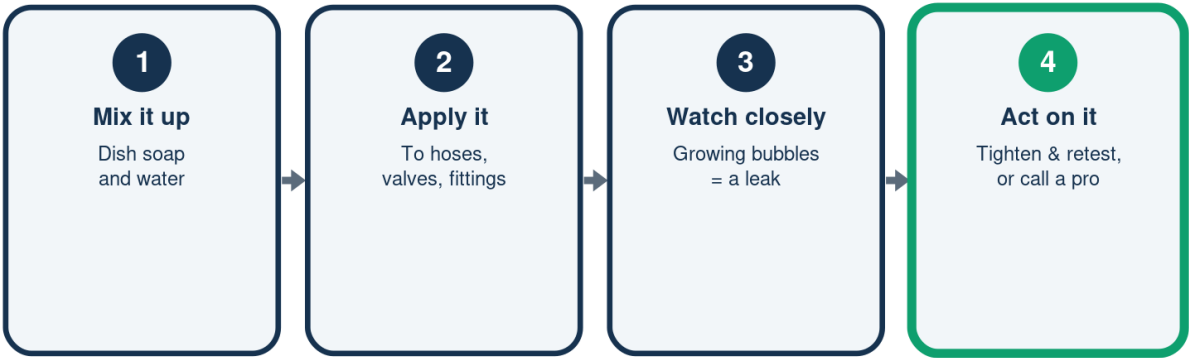
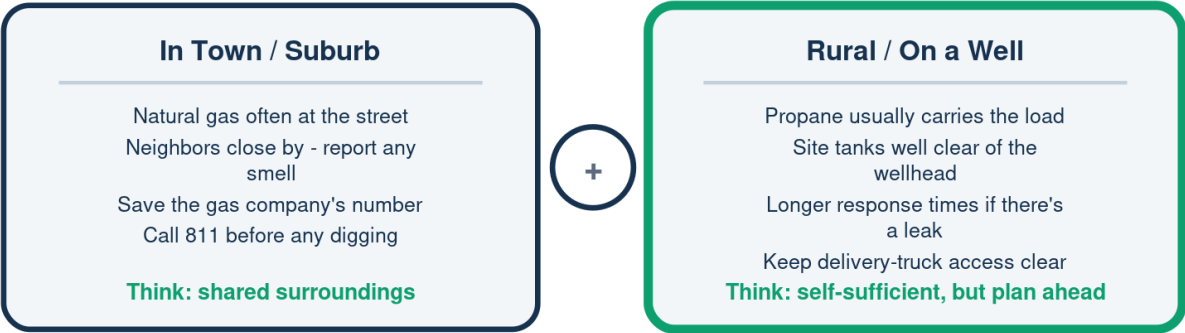


Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.

Gas Safety: Town vs. Country

Same habits, different surroundings



Know your gas company's number either way

Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.

Propane vs. Natural Gas: Handling

The everyday differences, side by side

	Propane	Natural Gas
Storage	Cylinders/tanks outdoors	Nothing to store
Leak check	Soapy water on fittings	Soapy water on fittings
Shutoff	Valve at the tank	Valve near the meter
Hookup	Supplier or gas fitter	Licensed gas fitter only

Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.



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— Bill

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A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill.

I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that comes from using these guides. Thanks for reading, and stay safe out there.

— *Bill*



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